Excavations at Hillyfields, Upper Holway, Taunton

Final report

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 533.01
February 2000

EXCAVATIONS AT HILLYFIELDS, UPPER HOLWAY, TAUNTON

Final report

by
Peter Leach

With a contribution by Wendy Smith

For further information please contact:
Simon Buteux, Iain Ferris or Gwilym Hughes (Directors)
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel: 0121 414 5513
Fax: 0121 414 5516
E-Mail: BUFAU@bham.ac.uk
Web Address: http://www.bufau.bham.ac.uk

EXCAVATIONS AT HILLYFIELDS, UPPER HOLWAY, TAUNTON

Final report

By Peter Leach

Introduction

In 1998, proposals for residential development of land known as Hillyfields, formerly part of the playing fields of Kings School, Taunton, resulted in the archaeological excavation of selected areas. A watching brief was subsequently undertaken, during the early stages of development. Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of C.G. Fry implemented the project and Son Ltd., in fulfilment of a planning condition imposed as part of the permission for development granted by Taunton Deane District Council. The fieldwork and its reporting was undertaken in accordance with a written brief: *Specification for an archaeological programme of works required by a development proposal: Stage 2. Land at Hilly Fields, Taunton* provided by Somerset County Council. That document was based upon the results of two earlier site evaluations (Wessex Archaeology 1997; and Ellis, BUFAU 1998), and the *General Specification for Archaeological Work in Somerset* (Somerset County Council 1995). This report incorporates the results of the latest excavations and a watching brief, with those of the previous evaluations.

The site and its setting

At the time of investigation, Hillyfields was a field of rough pasture covering approximately 6ha. at Upper Holway within the southern suburbs of Taunton, NGR ST 241237 (Fig. 1). Much of the site is southwest facing, with open views towards the Blackdown Hills, and with a moderate slope down to the Black Brook which forms its western boundary. It lies between 18 and 30m above OD, levelling off above the slope to the northeast towards Upper Holway Road (Fig. 2). The underlying rock formation is Triassic Keuper Marl, now commonly known as the Mercia Mudstone Group, a moderately soft, red-brown clay mudstone banded grey-green in places. This formation lay beneath an overburden of mixed buff-red, silty clays and gravel incorporating some larger fragments of sandstone, slate and chert (into which the majority of archaeological features were cut), and a more recent humic topsoil and sandy clay subsoil, at depths normally exceeding 0.5m below the modern surface.

In a wider context the site lies upon a low ridge, defined east and west by streams flowing north from the Blackdown Hills down to the River Tone and its floodplain. Earlier Pleistocene river terrace gravels still occupy some of the lower hilltops along both sides of the valley, of which the subsoil deposits at Hillyfields may be a remnant. The Vale of Taunton Deane has been a focus for human settlement since the Palaeolithic, a favoured locality, which also attracted later prehistoric and Romano-British communities.

Subsequently, this was exploited further in the later Saxon and medieval periods, which also saw the development of Taunton as its principal urban centre, at the heart of wealthy rural estates belonging to the Bishop's of Winchester.

Prior to the sequence of investigations reported upon here, archaeological knowledge relating to this site was sparse. There are 19th-century records of Roman coin finds, as well as the discovery of charcoal and burnt bones which may have been a cremation burial (SMR 44244). Some 600m to the south-east of Hillyfields a Roman coin hoard and skeletons were also found during the 19th century; further settlement remains of Iron Age and Romano-British date coming to light during construction of the M5 motorway in 1972 (SMR 43671). These discoveries prompted a need for further information on the Hillyfields site prior to its development, and thus the evaluations by trial trenching in 1997 (Wessex Archaeology) and by BUFAU in 1998 (Ellis). Both revealed evidence for earlier occupation; of Iron Age date close to the Black Brook to the north-west, and of Roman date along the ridge top to the east. In addition, both sets of evaluations encountered extensive quarry disturbances and other activity of mainly 19th-century date.

Excavation procedures

In August 1997 the first phase of site evaluation by Wessex Archaeology (*op cit*) involved the cutting of five long machine transects (W1 - W5) distributed across the site, to determine the presence and character of any archaeological remains, and to assist in the formulation of an appropriate archaeological response to proposals for a major housing development. As a result of these investigations Somerset County Council recommended that a further stage of evaluation would be required to clarify that response. Phase two involved the machine excavation and recording of another seven transects, positioned mainly towards the top of the hill (Tr.1- Tr.7), by BUFAU in the spring of 1998 (*op cit*). The data obtained from both phases of assessment resulted in a further scheme for investigation prior to the development commencing, as well as provision for a watching brief during construction works, and the subsequent analysis and preparation of a report for publication. This involved the opening of two trenches, A and B, each approximately 30 x 40m, close to the edge of the hill, and a third, C, 20 x 12m in area. slightly further back (Fig. 2). No further excavation areas were deemed necessary on the lower slopes of the site, where a build up of levels was proposed as part of the development. It was anticipated that these procedures would protect the archaeological remains identified close to the Black Brook in the Wessex Trench 5.

Excavation and recording of the three area trenches was undertaken by a professional team from the Field Archaeology Unit of Birmingham University, overseen by the author, in July 1998. Topsoil, and in places the upper horizon of subsoil, together over 0.4m thick, was removed mechanically to expose surfaces within which archaeological features and deposits could be identified. This definition was enhanced by hand cleaning, and the excavation thereafter of samples from the fills of a series of negatively cut features. The data so obtained was supported by a pro-forma written record, scale

drawings, surveys, photographic records and the collection of finds and samples from identified archaeological contexts. Considerable problems were experienced in clear definition of features, both at their initial exposure and in excavation, due largely to the somewhat variable colour and texture of the subsoils into which they were cut, and the predominantly dry conditions at the time of excavation. Similar problems were experienced at Norton Fitzwarren, where the geological conditions are replicated (Ellis, 1989, 61).

Results

TRENCH A (Fig. 3)

A rectangular area *c* 30 x 40m was opened just back from the valley slope down to the Black Brook, coinciding with the central sections of BUFAU Evaluation Trench 3, within which several features of Romano-British origin had been recognised. Up to 0.4 m. of overburden was removed by machine excavation to reveal a mixed horizon featuring areas of silty, buff-brown clay soils, stony red clays and mixed gravels. A series of more regular, linear elements appeared to be of man-made origin, an identification sometimes supported by the incorporation of charcoal or artefacts. However, clear definition of these elements was not always straightforward, and machine excavation resulted in a limited truncation of the subsoil surface in places. Trench A revealed the greatest density and most coherent group of archaeological remains on the site, providing the basis for the recognition of a sequence of activities. Three main periods are distinguished, based upon associated finds, stratigraphic association and a degree of inference, and the scheme is applied elsewhere within the site with varying degrees of confidence (Fig. 3).

Period 1: Late Iron Age/ early Roman

Period 2: Late 3rd - 4th-century Roman

Period 3: Late 18th - early 20th-century

Period 1

The earliest phase of activity recognised was represented principally by a set of linear ditches and shallow gullies belonging to what is interpreted as a rectilinear system of plots or compounds. These are defined on either side of ditch segments aligned approximately east south east – west north west across the centre of Trench A, comprising the relatively shallow and well-weathered cuts F837, F825, F849 and F829. They are considered to belong to an originally continuous boundary line, which probably extended beyond the confines of the trench. The majority were characterised by a steep V or narrow flat-bottomed profile, surviving up to 0.4m deep and over 0.5m wide (Fig. 5,

no.5). One broader segment, F849, suggests a recut, or perhaps the survival of weathered-back upper edges, lost elsewhere (Fig. 5, no.7). In all cases the ditch fills were markedly stony, with much coarse gravel and some larger stone, but artifacts were rare and even charcoal relatively sparse.

To the south of this boundary parts of two rectangular plots were separated by another boundary ditch, F844; at a right angle and of similar character, although its junction with F849 was lost. Within the eastern plot only a single shallow gully, F854, lying almost parallel to F844, may have been a contemporary feature. A group of four similar shallow gullies within the western plot, F850, F851, F845, and F853, also lie virtually parallel to F844 and to each other. None were more than 0.2m deep or 0.4m wide, with shallow concave profiles, and only one, F845, contained a few undiagnostic sherds of Roman coarse pottery. Part of another shallow ditch, F304, had a slightly different alignment, but its junction with the central boundary ditch F837 was destroyed here. All of these gullies may represent cultivation furrows

North of the central boundary, sub-division into regular plots was less clear. What may have been a second-phase boundary was the shallow curving ditch F847, which seemed to merge south with the ?second-phase cut of F849, and cut across a shallow gully, F848, to the north. Further west, two interrupted portions of broad, shallow, north-south aligned ditches, F835 and F842 could represent an original boundary division between north-east and north-west compounds (Fig. 5, no.1). Within the proposed northwestern compound, three other shallow, flat-bottomed and almost parallel gullies, F816, F830 and F834, none more than 0.2m deep, were interrupted by later features. The last was linked to a narrower curving gully, F821, and all may have been associated. Close to the western edge of Trench A, what may originally have been two linked segments of a linear gully, F804 and F838, were separated by a ditch of Period 2. Both were broad shallow cuts, up to 1m wide but little more than 0.1m deep, and no finds were recovered. The majority of the Period 1 features give the impression of significant erosion and some truncation, and only a handful of finds were recovered from any of their sampled fills.

Period 2

A new layout of linear boundaries, among other features, marking a clear break with the previous arrangements, defined Period 2. Two phases of activity can be distinguished, based upon boundaries and compounds set out on northeast - southwest / southeast - northwest alignments.

Phase i was marked by boundary ditches F803 and F823 /F305, forming the south-east corner of a rectangular plot, and faced by the north-east corner of another rectangular plot defined by ditches F826 and F827. The first pair of ditches, of concave profile and flattened base, survived up to 1m wide and 0.2m deep. The second set to the southeast was cut with a V-profile, up to 1m. wide and over 0.3m deep (Fig. 5, nos.5 and 8). Their shallower continuations, F301 and F303, seen originally in evaluation Trench 3, had suffered some truncation in that exercise, but their expected continuations beyond to the south -east and south -west were not found. Another short section of a shallow gully,

F832, was set parallel with the ditch F826, and was probably associated with it. All ditches were infilled with mixed clay silts and gravel, incorporating some larger stone fragments, charcoal, and Romano-British coarse pottery sherds.

To the north -east, two more originally continuous ditch segments, F806 and F818, were set parallel to F803 and may have been contemporary. The northern ditch, F806, broader and deeper than its southern continuation, contained charcoal, slag, iron nails and a small group of late Romano-British coarse pottery. The southern ditch F818 was cut by the Phase ii ditch F833, which may have continued its original line. What might have been a contemporary ditch, F840, approached the southwest enclosure from the south but terminated where cut across by the Phase ii ditch F843 (Fig. 5, no. 3). The cut, with steep sides and a concave base, survived up to 1.5m wide and over 0.5m deep, containing much gravel and some stone rubble in its lower fill, and concentrations of charcoal and a scatter of Romano-British coarse pottery sherds in its upper silts. This ditch was traced for over 10m further south during the subsequent watching brief, but no other associations or structures were observed.

Phase ii is essentially a development of the Period 2 layout, marked by the excavation of further boundary ditches and other features, following broadly the pattern set in Phase i. Most prominent were the boundary ditches F833/F839 and F841, which formed the north-west corner of what seems to have been a large rectilinear compound to the east. These were the largest features encountered in Trench A, cut with steep weathered sides and concave bases to over 0.6m deep and around 2.0m wide. Their stony clay/silt and gravel fills included some larger stone fragments, charcoal and Romano-British coarse pottery. The ditch F839 did not apparently continue south -east beyond a right-angle junction with another substantial ditch, F843, identified as F310 in the evaluation trench. This ditch was cut with steep sides and a broad flat base, almost 1.5m wide and up to 0.5m deep, and contained scatters of Romano-British pottery and lenses of charcoal in its upper fills (Fig. 5, no. 3). Continuing west for 10m, the ditch F843 then made another sharp turn to the south, as a narrower but slightly deeper cut, 0.7m wide and over 0.5m deep. This section was traced for several metres further south during the watching brief, running parallel with the earlier ditch F840, but its ultimate destination is unknown.

A scatter of smaller discrete features, principally pits or postholes, could hint at a third phase of activity, although since the majority contained no finds the attribution of some to a later period is equally possible. One large pit, F822, up to 0.5m deep, certainly cut the Phase i ditch F803, and contained some Romano-British pottery; but it was largely obliterated by the ditch F808 of Period 3, which separated it from a much shallower continuation, F824, which also cut into the Phase i ditch F823 (Fig. 5, no.8). The adjacent Phase i compound to the south -east was also cut by two shallow pits; F302/F836, an elongated pit or gully which also cut the central boundary ditch of Period 1, and a similar bowl-shaped cut, F831, further east. Towards the southwest corner of Trench A three small and shallow, bowl-shaped pits, up to 0.3m deep, F805, F812 and F814 could belong to either phase. Of these only F805 contained any Roman pottery, while the pit F814 was cut by F812, which was itself cut by a small posthole F813.

A large sub-circular pit, F820 appears to have been cut into the junction of ditches F833 and F841, although this may be no more than a deepening at this point, perhaps as a sump. A small posthole, 0.2m deep with some large packing stones, F819, was subsequently cut into the northern edge of F820, as well as into the earlier Phase i ditch F818. Further east the top fill of ditch F841 was cut by a shallow oval depression, F870, containing much ashy silt and charcoal, but possibly marking a post base. One other small circular posthole cut, F846, close to but separate from the Phase i ditch F840 to the southwest, also contained a high proportion of charcoal.

Towards the eastern boundary of Trench A another group of curvilinear features could not be directly linked to the main sequence, although almost certainly attributable to Period 2. Of these the most significant was the somewhat sinuous ditch F815/F852, also identified in the evaluation as F300. This had a narrow, V-shaped profile, up to 0.5m wide and over 0.3m deep in places, its fills including scatters and patches of charcoal, fragments of slate used as packing or a lining, and a few Romano-British pottery sherds. At two points this ditch intersected and perhaps cut across a shallower curving gully, F817, and another of similar character, F828, a little further north, adjacent to a further shorter and probably truncated gully segment, F809. All these features may have been truncated by deeper modern cultivation or other activity, noticeable in the depth of overburden towards this end of Area A. A continuation of the ditch F300 to the south - west, as far as the Period 3 ditches F800 and F802 which cut it, was recorded subsequently during the watching brief, but could not be traced further.

Period 3

A much later phase of activity was marked in this area by a further set of linear boundaries, and other disturbances emanating from within the surface overburden. In the southwest corner a pair of linear ditches, F800 and F802, followed a relatively straight northwest - southeast alignment, approximately 2m apart. Also identified further west in the evaluation as F307 and F308, and to the south as F313 and F314, these ditches were traced for another 20m to the south -east during the later watching brief. Both were relatively broad and shallow, the northern ditch F802 up to 0.4m deep, the southern F800 just over 0.2m, and containing fragments of brick, clay pipe, coal, animal bone and fragments of glazed early-19th-century ceramics within their stony silt and gravel fills.

A ditch of similar proportions, F801/F306 and F808, extended north east across the area, deepening from west to east, from a right-angle junction with the ditch F802 (Fig. 5, no. 8). The latter appears to have been cut later than F808, although a similar range of post-medieval material dominated the finds from its fills. Two other small features, a shallow posthole, F810, and an associated gully, F811, near the south-east corner of Area A, are also dated to this period by finds. Some 20m north -west of the excavation area and intersected by the evaluation Trench 3, a deep cut, F312, marked the eastern edge of a quarry into the underlying mudstone bedrock. This large disturbance also contained some 19th-century material, and may have been linked with a similar quarry edge and infill (5018) seen further west towards the northeast end of the Wessex Evaluation

Trench 5.

TRENCH B (Fig. 2)

Located some 50m south of Trench A and of similar dimensions, this area for excavation lay just over the crest of the slope overlooking the valley of the Black Brook. It was positioned to explore further the context of Roman features recorded in the Wessex Evaluation Trench 4, and BUFAU Trench 7. The machine excavation of up to 0.4m of more recent overburden once again revealed a horizon of variably coloured and textured deposits, of both natural and man-made origin.

Periods 1 and 2

In the event, features and deposits of Romano-British origin were very much sparser in this area than had been anticipated (Fig. 4). Although no direct links were established, one group can probably be equated with activity defined as belonging to Periods 1 and 2 in Trench A. What might have been the earliest, although intrinsically undated, were a series of shallow, parallel gullies, F901 - F910, towards the north-west corner of the excavated area. These were similar in character and general north-east - south-west alignment to some gullies recorded in Trench A and assigned to Period 1, e.g. F845, F850-1 and F853-4. Those in Trench B form a more regular set, and could be interpreted with greater confidence as the bottoms of cultivation furrows.

To the north -east a narrow V-shaped ditch, F915, could be traced for almost 10m before its obliteration by a later ditch, F914 on an almost identical northwest - southeast line. A few sherds of Romano-British coarse pottery and its alignment relative to the gullies further west suggest a boundary of Period 2. Approximately 7m to the east of its original line was revealed the butt end of a ditch, F917, surviving up to 2m wide and almost 0.4m deep (Fig. 5, no.6), originally located as F407 within the Wessex evaluation trench. This ditch was soon obliterated by a major 19th-century disturbance, F912, to the north -east. But its continuation may have been located further to the east as a much shallower ditch, F700, at the northeast end of BUFAU Trench 7. From the ditch terminal was recovered a large assemblage of pottery (approximately 50% of the total from Hillyfields), as well as roof slate, iron nails and slag, an iron anvil, glass, and a shale loomweight (Fig. 6 nos.1-5, 7, 8 & 13; and Fig. 7. nos. 1-3). This group of material suggests a deliberate deposit of perhaps later 4th-century date, and thus another feature of Period 2. No other features of this period had survived in Trench B, though contemporary remains may well have been obliterated by extensive post-medieval disturbances to the east and north.

Period 3

All the remaining activity in this trench can be attributed to the last two centuries or so, although a sequence of events is detectable. The earliest may have been the cutting of two relatively shallow, parallel ditches of concave profile, F914 and F916, which cross most of the area from north -west to south -east. These were best defined to the south, but were shallower to the north where also disturbed by later activity, although the eastern ditch

F914 terminated at a butt end, F913, (as may the western, F916), before reaching the north baulk of Trench B. These pair of ditches contained a little 18th and 19th-century material, and appear to continue the line of the double ditches F800 and F802 in Trench A.

A terrace, F912, which was cut almost level into the gentle slope of the hillside here, occupied a large part of the northern quarter of the trench. Its deepest part and edge to the north and east were not reached in Trench B, although partly revealed a few metres beyond as an almost vertical cut up to 2m deep into the underlying natural mudstone (seen later during the watching brief for road construction). This cut had been infilled with a mixture of loamy, buff-yellow soils and clay, mixed with some brick and charcoal bands or patches, which deepened progressively northwards. To the south -west the edge of this terrace was cut by a slightly deeper, curving elongated ditch or quarry pit, F900, up to 1.5m deep and with a flat base. This contained a darker fill of clays and silts mixed with much ash and charcoal, brick and tile, animal bone, and fragments of mainly 19th-century pottery and glass. A smaller elongated disturbance, F918, contained an almost identical fill and appeared to cut the earlier ditch F916, but was not excavated. A smaller and shallower pit to the west, F911, was undated but may have been contemporary. The latest phase of activity detected in Trench B was the laying of two clay land drains down slope from east to west, probably early in the 20th century

TRENCH C (Fig. 2)

A smaller area excavation to the east of Trench B was planned to investigate the possibility of Romano-British occupation continuing further in that direction. An area 12 x 20 m was opened mechanically to a maximum depth of 0.4m, revealing mixed deposits of mainly natural origin, similar to those seen in Trenches A and B.

A handful of suspected man-made features and fills were subsequently defined, but none of the excavated samples produced any datable material. A badly truncated ditch or gully, F950, aligned approximately east-west, was evidently the same ditch (F700) as that found previously at the northeast end of BUFAU Trench 7. This has been suggested as a continuation of the Period 2 ditch F917/407 in Trench B. It was traced for little more than 4m across Trench C, but two smaller features were sampled at the point where its projected continuation would have reached the east baulk of the trench. These were a shallow, elongated pit, F953, and a posthole, F952, both containing charcoal but otherwise undated. To the north -west Trench C was crossed by another shallow and probably truncated gully or ditch bottom, F951. This may have converged obliquely with the gully F950 further west beyond the trench, but their relationship is unknown.

A watching brief maintained during the cutting of the access road into the Hillyfields development from Upper Holway Road, and north -east of Trench C, exposed only a stone-lined drain and one or two shallow boundary ditches of suspected post-medieval origin

.

The Finds

PREHISTORIC POTTERY *by P. Leach*

A handful of prehistoric pottery sherds were recognised among the bulk of Roman and post-medieval assemblages. All were small, and for the most part heavily abraded. Of these the majority (5 sherds) were of a medium-coarse, black or red/brown sandy fabric with some larger, angular white quartz inclusions. There were no diagnostic sherds, and only one was recovered from what may have been a contemporary context - a gully, 5007, in Wessex Trench 5. The remainder was residual in the fills of Period 2 ditches in Trench A, F823, F827 and F840. Two more sherds of a finer, sandy grey fabric were also recovered from the Period 2 pit or gully, F302, in this trench. These were from a small beaded-rim jar or bowl of probable final Iron Age date. Four very small and abraded rim sherds in a black, lightly sanded, corky fabric with oxidized red-brown surfaces, came from a colluvial deposit, 202, in Wessex Trench 2. From an organic-rich, stream deposited layer, 208, also in Trench 2, another small body sherd of a hard sandy fabric might, alternatively, be of the Romano-British Fabric 2.

Almost all of these sherds were from residual contexts of Roman or uncertain date, scattered widely across the site, and are by no means a homogenous collection. The majority were almost certainly manufactured during the first millennium BC, probably during the Iron Age, although the only diagnostic sherds were from the bead-rim vessel of 1st-century BC/AD origin in Area A. This appears to be equivalent to Fabric 15 at Maidenbrook Farm (Ferris and Bevan 1993) and Fabric 8 at Norton Fitzwarren (Woodward 1989). None of the prehistoric pottery has been illustrated.

ROMAN POTTERY *by P. Leach*

With the inclusion of material from both phases of evaluation, approximately 500 sherds of Roman pottery, weighing 6395gms. were recovered from all contexts at Hillyfields (Table 1). Quantification by minimum vessel estimation rather than by vessel equivalents was attempted for this small and generally widely scattered collection, although some 50% was obtained from a single ditch terminal (F917) in Trench B. The great majority came from contexts of Period 2 on the site, largely defined by this pottery as belonging to the later 3rd and 4th centuries AD. This group was studied with reference to the National Roman Fabric Reference Collection (Tomber and Dore 1998), local published assemblages from Norton Fitzwarren (Timby 1989), Maidenbrook Farm (Ferris and Bevan 1993), and Greyhound Yard, Dorchester (Woodward *et al* 1993). The material was classified primarily by fabric, of which nine were clearly distinguished and are defined as follows. Relatively few sherds could be identified with reference to a detailed form classification, which was not undertaken, although a higher proportion of material could be grouped into broader form categories (bowl, jar, dish, etc.), which are referred to in the fabric descriptions. A quantified record of the fabric sherds per context, and more

detailed fabric definitions form part of the paper archive. The pottery has been sorted into the individual fabrics while retaining its context identity, as deposited in the Somerset County Museum.

Fabric 1: Black-burnished ware (BB1). Based upon visual inspection only, the great bulk of the Hillyfields' material appears to be of south-east Dorset/Poole Harbour origin (SEDBB1), although given the site's location, some of this pottery could have been supplied from the more recently recognised source in west Dorset/Somerset (SOW BB1) (Holbrook and Bidwell 1991). It comprised 42.2% by sherd count and 38.9% by weight of the Hillyfields' assemblage. *Forms*: Wheelmade, everted-rim jars, some with incised linear and cross-hatch decoration, later 3rd and 4th-century types (Fig. 6, nos.1-4); plain dishes, and flange-rim bowls (Fig. 6, nos. 5 & 6).

Fabric 2: A medium/coarse, hard sandy fabric, also well gritted with angular and sub-rounded white quartz, some black mica plates, occasional ironstone or other dark minerals. Colour generally dark grey to black but with some lighter grey or buff bodies, particularly towards margins. Exterior surfaces may be smoothed or burnished but the majority are heavily abraded, resulting in a speckled appearance and pimply surface texture. A locally produced coarseware type probably imitating the later products of the Dorset or South West BB1 industry, and comprising 23.7% by sherd count and 28.5% by weight of the Hillyfields' assemblage.
Forms: Mainly wheelmade, including everted-rim jars, some with incised linear and cross-hatch decoration (Fig. 6, nos.7 & 8); plain dishes (Fig. 6, no.9).

Fabric 3: Fine sandy, slightly micaceous fabric with occasional larger, angular quartz, and sub-rounded red clay pellets or iron. Light grey-buff body with darker grey or black surfaces. Probably of relatively local origin but sparsely represented, comprising 2.8% by sherd count and 1.5% by weight of the total assemblage.
Forms: Small jars/beakers and bowls, wheelmade, but few diagnostic sherds and no decoration seen. None illustrated.

Fabric 4: Medium-fine sandy fabric with scatters of sub-rounded purple-grey slate, more occasional angular grey-white quartz, some white mica, and a few sub-rounded red-brown iron or sandstone inclusions. Colour predominantly pale/mid grey with sometimes a darker grey core. Probably of local manufacture, similar to Fabric 1 at Norton Fitzwarren (Timby 1989) and Fabric 14 at Maidenbrook Farm (Ferris and Bevan 1993). Comprises 14% by sherd count and 7.6% by weight of the total assemblage.
Forms: Mainly jars, including some larger storage vessels, hand and wheelmade, but few diagnostic sherds and no decoration seen (Fig. 6, no. 10)

Fabric 5: Coarse sandy fabric speckled with larger, grey-white angular quartz, sub-

rounded red-brown clay pellets or iron, and some purple-grey slate. Colour predominantly light grey or buff grey with buff or buff-orange surfaces. Probably of local manufacture, similar to Fabric 13 at Maidenbrook Farm (Ferris and Bevan 1993). Comprises 5.9% by sherd count and 11.5% by weight of the total assemblage.
Forms: Mainly thick-walled, hand-made storage jars, some with finger-pressed decoration (Fig. 6, no.11).

Fabric 6: Medium soft, slightly sandy fabric, lightly speckled with rounded and sub-angular white quartz, occasional purple-grey slate, and mica. Colour, a characteristic sandwich of buff-orange and sometimes darker grey core, with lighter grey margins and a pale grey surface. Probably a local product, similar to Fabric 2 at Norton Fitzwarren (Timby 1989) and Fabric 10 at Maidenbrook Farm (Ferris and Bevan 1993). Comprises 4.2% by sherd count and 1.8% by weight of the total assemblage.
Forms: Wheelmade jars and bowls (Fig. 6, no.12), but few diagnostic sherds and no decoration seen.

Fabric 7: Oxfordshire red colour coat ware, mainly 4th-century (Young 1977). Rare at Hillyfields, comprising 2.2% by sherd count and 2.9% by weight of the total assemblage.
Forms: A few diagnostic sherds included footrings and rims from plain and flange-rim bowls (Fig. 6, no.13).

Fabric 8: Oxfordshire mortaria, white colour-coated ware, mainly 4th-century (Young 1977). Represented by a few sherds at Hillyfields, this is the only mortaria fabric recorded, comprising 2.0% by sherd count and 5.6% by weight of the total assemblage.
Forms: Mortaria, base and body sherds only; none illustrated.

Fabric 9: Samian (*Terra Sigillata*). Only three very abraded sherds were recovered, probably from bowls or dishes of 2nd-century Central Gaulish manufacture, but no closer identification of their forms was possible.

Discussion

The Hillyfields Roman pottery is a relatively small assemblage, but worthy of comparison with those few local collections which have as yet been similarly analysed. Like these, the Hillyfields' material is dominated stylistically by 4th-century vessel forms, though some of later 3rd-century manufacture may also be present. Only the Samian sherds were identifiable as of earlier date (2nd-century), their heavily abraded condition signifying a higher degree of residuality, both in use and following discard. Most of the material had suffered moderate to heavy abrasion, a factor probably to be accounted for as much by local soil conditions as its use and post-depositional history on a relatively stone-free site. The condition of the group of pottery which appears to have been deliberately deposited in the ditch terminal F917, was not noticeably better than sherds

recovered elsewhere on the site, principally from the fills of other ditches, although this group was distinctive in its generally larger size and much higher proportion of joining sherds. A similar degree of abrasion has been noted among the ceramics from Maidenbrook Farm and Norton Fitzwarren, as well as for material from other unpublished material in the Taunton Deane area. Elsewhere in Somerset, Roman ceramics can survive in much better condition, notably in areas with more neutral or alkaline soils such as the Ilchester region or around Shepton Mallet, where however, much stonier environments may contribute more obviously to a degree of wear.

As noted at both Maidenbrook Farm (Ferris and Bevan 1993) and Norton Fitzwarren (Timby 1989), the Hillyfields' assemblage has a strong local input, 52% against 48% imports, although markedly lower than at either of these sites. At Norton Fitzwarren little more than 10% was non-local, while at Maidenbrook Farm the proportion was rather higher, around 25%. Since the Hillyfields' assemblage is considerably smaller than those of the other two local sites, there may be greater scope for distortion; non-local coarsewares being over represented. This factor could be further enhanced by the recovery of virtually half the assemblage from a single deposit - the ditch terminal F917 (Table 1). Here the proportion of imported material is almost 3 to 2 in favour, which must weight the overall site sample. However, the precise status of this deposit is unclear; was it a special deposit, and thus more probably atypical ?, or did it represent a clear-up and disposal episode which might reflect more accurately the spectrum of material at Hillyfields overall?

These three sites are still too limited a sample, collectively or individually, to interpret with any confidence, although a greater reliance upon local products in this region, compared to circumstances further east, is apparent. Nevertheless, imported BB1 is still the dominant coarseware fabric at Hillyfields. Despite their proximity, there are significant variations in the local coarsewares present on each site. Higher proportions of these fabrics are shared by Norton Fitzwarren and Maidenbrook, whereas the main local ware at Hillyfields (Fabric 2) may not be represented at the other sites, suggesting its more local manufacture and market. Fabrics 4, 5 and 6 are, however, shared with one or both of the other sites. It is difficult to see any marked variation within the assemblages that might be employed as status indicators. The higher proportion of imports at Hillyfields, if reliable, might suggest wider contacts and perhaps greater prosperity, but other archaeological evidence suggests that all three were broadly similar, agriculturally based, rural settlements. Although quantified at Hillyfields by minimum estimation using rims only, all three assemblages are dominated by jar forms, either the domestic cooking or storage varieties, or the larger storage vessels (over 65% here). Bowls and dishes, including mortaria, were present in much smaller numbers (approximately 32%), while such tableware as cups or flagons are barely represented at Hillyfields (less than 3%). This pattern appears to be relatively widespread and a distinctive feature of lower-status rural sites in Roman Britain (Evans 1996).

POST-ROMAN CERAMICS *by P. Leach*

Pottery, brick, tile and clay pipe fragments, along with other items of glass, metal, coal, etc., were collected from most of the contexts assigned to Period 3, and similar material was present in the topsoil. Not all of this material was retained, notably much of the brick and tile, and no detailed classification or quantification was undertaken. Most of the diagnostic material can be assigned to the 18th, 19th and early 20th-centuries, although one or two abraded sherds of unglazed coarse-gritted pottery may be of medieval date. The post-medieval ceramics include glazed earthenware from Donyatt, Bristol and probably Staffordshire; some stoneware, and finer wares, including porcelain, white ware and transfer-printed tableware, which were relatively common. Clay pipe stems were relatively numerous but could not be provenanced or dated closer than to the 18th and 19th centuries. One late 18th-century bowl and some stems came from one of the Period 3 double ditches, F307 in Area A.

GLASS *by P. Leach*

One rim fragment of a Roman glass vessel was found within the Period 2 ditch terminal F917 in Trench B (context 408). A plain, cylindrical cup or beaker of pale green glass with a thickened rim (Fig. 7, no. 2). This is a common 4th-century type, found on many sites in Roman Britain, e.g. Porchester (Harden 1975); Ilchester (Price 1982); Uley (Price 1993).

Glass recovered from several contexts of Period 3 was identified variously as fragments of mainly 18th and 19th-century vessels, including coloured and clear wine bottles and other containers, table ware, and some window glass. Only a sample of this material was kept and none has been classified or quantified further.

STONE *by P. Leach*

Flint and Chert: A total of 37 pieces of flint and 29 pieces of chert were collected from various contexts across the site, during all three phases of investigation. The flint was predominantly black or dark grey in colour, although there are a few of lighter grey colour, or mottled grey and white. The majority are flakes and several retain some cortex, which has been stained buff/pink in the local environment. All of this flint has been brought to the site and worked there or nearby; most probably originating from chalk sources further east. A small number are more heavily patinated chips or pebble fragments, showing no signs of artificial working. These appear to be of natural origin, perhaps originally components of the local Pleistocene terrace gravels. Among the imported material are several reworked flakes, including small blade fragments from Wessex Trench 2 (202), Wessex Trench 4 (401), Wessex Trench 5 (5004) - possibly an attempted microlith, and BUFAU Trench 6 (6000). In Trench A small burin, possibly another microlith, came from the Period 2 ditch F839 (8033), and a flake reworked as a scraper from the same ditch (8087).

Most of the chert fragments were a golden-brown colour, although some darker buff-grey or red-brown pieces were present. Several retained some lighter cream-buff cortex. Chert is a component of the local terrace gravels and most fragments are heavily patinated. Much of this material derives ultimately from the Upper Greensand, which today forms the neighbouring Blackdown Hills, and it is possible that chert was brought from there for use at Hillyfields. Virtually all of the chert fragments recovered appeared to be flakes, among which were three probable cores, from Wessex Trench 2 (202 and 209), and Wessex Trench 4 (401). A few flakes showed signs of secondary working, notably a large, discoidal scraper from BUFAU Trench 6 (6000). None of the material has been illustrated.

Almost all of the flint and chert at Hillyfields is likely to be of prehistoric origin, although with one or two possible exceptions none of it is diagnostic of any particular period. All the material was derived from secondary contexts, ranging from Iron Age to modern, and a few from colluvium or stream deposits in Wessex Trenches 2 and 5. The quantity and distribution is most likely to be indicative of offsite activity, although the Black Brook and its relatively sheltered valley may have attracted intermittent prehistoric activity.

Shale: A complete, plain circular, turned spindlewhorl made of Purbeck Shale, from context 9021, F917 ditch terminal, Trench B, Period 2 (Fig. 7, no. 3). Spindlewhorls are a relatively common Roman site find, those of Purbeck Shale being manufactured on the Dorset coast near Purbeck . This example is probably of late 3rd or 4th-century manufacture (Lawson 1976).

Slate: Fragments of lustrous, pale grey/green slate or phyllite were widespread in excavated contexts, and in the machined levels of overburden. Some of this may be of natural origin, a component of the Pleistocene gravels, but some larger split and shaped fragments also occurred in certain ditch fills. The most notable concentrations were from the ditch terminal F917, and from the base of the ditch or gully F300/F852, where they appear to have been used as a lining to improve drainage. No complete or pierced fragments were recovered, but many may originally have been roof tiles. Similar slate was present at Maidenbrook Farm, some of which was positively identified as roofing slate (Ferris and Bevan 1993, 36). In appearance this material resembles the Delabole slate of north Cornwall, although there was probably a closer source in Devon or west Somerset for the material here. None is illustrated.

METALWORK *by P. Leach*

Only two objects of non-ferrous metal were recovered; the tip of a small copper alloy needle or point with a square shank and thickened head, from the Period 2 ditch F302/F827, and a large copper alloy, circular buckle with the pin missing, found unstratified on the surface in Trench A. This may be of post-medieval date. Neither is illustrated.

A handful of heavily corroded iron nails were recovered from Period 2 contexts in Trenches A and B. Another small group of nails and other corroded iron objects was recovered from Period 3 contexts in both trenches, and is likely to be of post-medieval date.

A rectangular, slightly tapered block of iron, with heavy surface corrosion, came from the fill 408 of the F917/407 ditch terminal in Trench B. Weighing 1375 gms and measuring 10cms x 4.5cms x 4.5cms, this is likely to be a small block anvil (Fig. 7, no. 1). This is a relatively small example of a type well known from Roman Britain, which would have been set in a socket cut into a larger wooden anvil block or bench for use (Manning 1985, 2-3).

A few pieces of iron slag were also recovered from the ditch terminal F917/407, but have not been submitted for further analysis.

CHARRED PLANT REMAINS *by Wendy Smith*

A previous environmental assessment of one sample collected from an Iron Age context (208) close to the Black Brook during the Wessex Archaeology site evaluation in 1997, established that "preservation (of charred plant remains) was good to exceptional and the full range of charred elements were present" (Allen and Wyles unpublished). On the basis of that result four more samples were selected for full archaeobotanical analysis during the excavations of 1998. These were collected on the basis of visually apparent concentrations of charred material from linear ditch features in Trenches A and B. Samples 1 (8088) and 2 (8087) from the ditch F839, Sample 3 (8066) from the ditch F840, and Sample 4 (9021) from the ditch terminal F917.

The samples were analysed in order to:

1. establish the range of cultivated and wild plants present.

2. explore the possibility of information on crop husbandry or cultivation methods.

3. explore evidence for agricultural practice and/or economy of the site.

Method

The sample size at Hillyfields ranged from the standard 20-litre soil sample to a minimum of 12 litres. In all cases this was too small, and an increase of sampling size to 30 litres (equivalent to two buckets of soil) is recommended for such sites in future. Certainly, in the case of Sample 4, where only 12 litres were collected, a larger sample might have greatly enhanced the chance to securely identify the type of wheat used, and perhaps better understand the formation of this deposit. The samples were processed at the University of Birmingham using bucket flotation over a 500 micron mesh sieve, and

the resulting heavy residues were wet sieved over a 1mm mesh sieve. Only the flots were sorted for charred plant remains using a low-powered microscope at magnification of up to x20. Final identifications were made using magnifications up to x50.

Identifications were made using the comparative modern seed collections of James Greig and Lisa Moffett (English Heritage, University of Birmingham). Lisa Moffett also kindly aided in the identification of wheat grains made here (see below). Nomenclature for the plant remains follows Stace (1997) for indigenous species, and Zohary and Hopf (1994) for the economic species. The traditional binomal system for the cereals has been used here, following Zohary and Hopf (1994, Table 3 p.24 and Table 5 p.58). Quantification is based on the reconstruction of whole plant parts. Glume bases of emmer/spelt or spelt were quantified individually, such that a complete spelt spikelet, for example, would be quantified as two glume bases and one rachis internode.

Results

Table 2 lists the taxa identified and Figure 8 provides a breakdown of the types of plants recovered in each sample. In general, only small quantities of charred plants were recovered from the ditches in Trench A (Samples 1, 2 and 3). A much larger sample was recovered from the ditch terminal F917 in Trench B (Sample 4), which was primarily charred cereal grain, with small amounts of glume bases and weed/wild plant seeds. The weed/wild plant assemblage is extremely limited and usually not identified to species level, so will not be discussed here.

Discussion

Only small amounts of carbonised plant remains were recovered in Samples 1-3 and, therefore, no detailed interpretation of these samples is put forward. The more abundant charred plant remains from Sample 4, however, are worth further discussion. In terms of taphonomy, it is likely that all four samples represent secondary deposition; occurring either through intentional dumping or from field manuring. Use of cereal processing waste as fuel is well attested (Hillman 1981, 1984a, 1984b), and disposal of spent fuel either into the ditch system or directly dumped on the site seems a likely explanation for its appearance at Hillyfields. For example, the suggestion of intentional dumping of midden material in the ditch terminal F917 (Sample 4) is reinforced by the nature of other artifacts from this context.

Trend in recovery of plant remains

The results from Samples 1-3 suggest that although charred plant remains do survive in the linear ditch fills, they are in such low quantities that that only an inordinately large sample size (calculated to be between 208 to 625 litres in this case - based on van der Veen and Fieller 1982) would produce enough charred plant remains to generate reliable and representative archaeobotanical interpretations. Although the smallest sample in terms of soil volume collected, Sample 4, had a much higher density of charred plants per litre of soil (13.3 seeds per litre, as compared to 0.6, 1.2 and 0.4 seeds per litre in Samples

1-3, respectively).

With so few samples it is difficult to determine if this pattern in the recovery of charred remains is truly representative of dumping practices on site or not. However, it may be that the dumping of charred debris/waste materials was limited to certain areas or features.

Type of cereals grown

The charred plant remains from Sample 4 are dominated by cereal grains, primarily hulled barley (*Hordeum* sp.) and wheat (*Triticum* sp.) grains. The preservation of cereal grains in this sample was fairly poor, and in most cases if cereal grains were not broken down into fragments, they were highly warped (sometimes having a puffy appearance). As a result it was not possible to take the identification of the wheat grains to species level. Morphologically (Jacomet 1987) the shape of the cereal grains could be attributed either to spelt (*Triticum spelta*) or free-threshing wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L./ *Triticum durum* Desf.).

Cereal chaff is less likely to survive charring than cereal grain (Boardman and Jones 1990), and certainly survives only in small quantities in these four samples. On the basis of the cereal chaff which does survive, however, no free-threshing wheat rachis is present, only the glume bases of hulled wheat, some of which were identified as spelt. As a result, it seems more likely that the wheat chaff recovered at Hillyfields is hulled wheat, most likely spelt, rather than free-threshing wheat.

The barley is clearly hulled, but in the absence of well-preserved barley rachis internodes it is not possible to determine if the barley was the two-rowed or the six-rowed variety. No attempt was made to compare the ratio of straight and twisted grains, since the preservation of cereal grain in the assemblage was poor.

Evidence for cereal crop processing

Spelt (*Triticum spelta*) and emmer (*Triticum dicoccum*) are hulled wheats, which generally have two grains in the spikelet of the cereal ear. Although rarely grown today, hulled wheats do have a number of properties which would have been advantageous to farmers in the past. In particular they can tolerate poor soil conditions and can resist a range of fungal diseases (Nesbitt and Samuel 1996, 42). During threshing, cereal ears of spelt and emmer will break up into individual spikelets, which contain grains surrounded by tough chaff. At this point the ancient farmer could either store or further process the spiklets of hulled wheat. Storage of hulled wheat in spikelets is well known archaeobotanically, and may serve to protect the wheat from insect predation (*op cit*, 52). In order to dehusk hulled wheat, the spikelets must be pounded and the resulting mixture of freed grain and chaff is then winnowed, to separate light weed seeds and larger fragments of chaff from the grain, and then sieved to remove any remaining weed seeds and smaller fragments of chaff from the grain.

Hulled barley requires dehusking before consumption, in order to remove the awns which are harmful if ingested (e.g. Hillman 1981, 136). Although barley is often considered as "an inferior staple and the poor person's bread ...barley withstands drier conditions, poorer soils and some salinity" where other crops will fail (Zohary and Hopf 1994, 55). Barley is the main cereal used for beer fermentation in the Old World, and the crop was, and still is, a most important feed supplement for domestic animals (*op. cit.*). Although it is not possible to determine from one sample alone whether the Hillyfields' community cultivated barley or brought it in, perhaps as livestock feed, it does account for nearly half of all cereal identifications made to species level in Sample 4.

The other three samples produced assemblages too small to be of interpretative value. but cereal grains account for 76% of the overall assemblage in the ditch terminal F917, which suggests that this deposit is derived from fully processed, semi-clean cereal grain (Hillman 1981; 1984a; 1984b). There are several explanations for the dominance of cereal grain in Sample 4, which could have resulted from the accidental destruction of a stored crop, intentional destruction of a spoiled crop, the accidental charring of parched or malted grains, or the intentional use of malt waste as fuel.

Conclusions

The archaeobotanical assemblage from Hillyfields was primarily made up of cereal grain, with small amounts of chaff and wild/weed plant seeds. The three sample from Trench A contained only small quantities of plant remains. This could be the result of taphonomic processes on site which do not favour the preservation of charred remains in such contexts, or may in fact reflect disposal practices in the settlement.

Identification of wheat to species level was not possible due to poor preservation of the cereal grain recovered, however, the chaff remains from all four samples only include hulled wheat glumes bases, which suggests that hulled wheat, most likely spelt, was cultivated. On the basis of only one sample with abundant plant remains it is not possible to determine the source(s) for this deposit, but it could have resulted from either accidental or intentional destruction of a stored crop, charring of parched or malted grains, or represent the use of malt waste as fuel.

Discussion

Prehistoric /early Roman settlement

A primary phase of settlement identified as Period 1 from evidence recorded in Trench A, is interpreted as belonging to the late Iron Age and early Romano-British period. However, there are hints of yet earlier use, principally in artifacts, which may have no direct relationship with those remains classified as belonging to Period 1. Fragments of imported worked flint and of more local chert testify to the potential for some Mesolithic and Neolithic/Early Bronze Age presence in this locality, although its quantity, distribution and a scarcity of diagnostic pieces are probably indicative of off-site activity.

The best surviving evidence is probably to be found alongside the Black Brook, where alluvial and colluvial deposits, occasionally incorporating flints, chert, carbonised plant remains or abraded prehistoric pottery, were sampled by the Wessex Archaeology evaluation trenches (Fig. 2). One of these, Wessex Trench 5, contained structural evidence associated with later prehistoric pottery, suggesting the likelihood of some settlement remains surviving in the valley bottom towards the north-west corner of the site; while in Wessex Trench 2 the preliminary assessment of a sample from deposits associated with the Black Brook demonstrated the presence of carbonised grain and grain chaff (Wessex Archaeology 1997). Little additional evidence was gained during the second phase of evaluation in this area (Ellis 1998), and the scheme for developing the site ensured that no further archaeological investigation was required there.

On that part of the hill top investigated by Trench A the earliest phase of activity was marked by the layout of shallow linear ditches demarcating an arrangement of rectilinear plots. Only a fragment of this system was revealed, and the size of the plots or enclosures, and their extent is unknown. The plots were laid out on a central line of ditches (F837, F825, F849 and F829), aligned approximately east south east - west-north-west, and there were hints of some later modification or additions. The boundary ditches defining the plots were presumably accompanied by banks and/or hedges, but no direct evidence survived. The best evidence for their use are a possible set of cultivation furrows in the south-west enclosure, and what may have been another set further south in Trench B. Their primarily agricultural context is perhaps also supported by the virtual absence of artifacts or animal bone (although the latter barely survives in this environment), and the sparsity of charcoal in the fills of their defining ditches and other features. This could suggest a location at some distance from the parent settlement, but also poses a problem in assigning them to a time frame.

Only eight sherds of pottery were recovered from all the sampled features of Period 1, of which six were undiagnostic body sherds of Roman Fabrics 1 and 4, and two were possible Iron Age body sherds. The end date for this arrangement is the later 3rd-century layout of Period 2 on a new alignment, possibly following a period of abandonment and degradation of the earlier remains. Morphologically, rectilinear agricultural enclosures such as these remains appear to represent, could have originated at any time during the first millennium BC as well as in the Roman period. Given the possibility of a later prehistoric settlement located downhill towards the Black Brook, these plots may have originated as components of a field system belonging with it. A few other residual sherds of prehistoric pottery from Period 2 contexts in Trench A, including two of final Iron Age form, could support this hypothesis. The presence of a few Roman sherds and hints of later modifications, suggest that the plots were in use for an extended period.

A likely scenario is a system of small fields laid out along the hilltop, probably some time during the Iron Age, and farmed by a nearby community with a continuity extending into the early Roman period. We have no information relating to this phase of agriculture, although both arable and pastoral activities are likely; the former strongly supported by the (undated) carbonised grain and chaff sample found close to the Black Brook. Whether or not there was a hiatus between Periods 1 and 2, the 3rd century saw a new arrangement

of boundaries and a probable reorganisation of the land.

Later Roman settlement

By contrast with Period 1, the new arrangement of plots and other features which are assigned to Period 2, are much better dated. The majority contain pottery and occasional artifacts, much of which is of later 3rd or 4th-century manufacture. A higher quantity of artifacts, along with the presence of more charcoal and charred plant remains, as well as the increased numbers and arrangement of Period 2 features, suggest that they are located within an area of settlement.

Regrettably, it was not possible to discern any structures within any of the main excavation areas, either because the evidence was slight and has since been lost, or because none were actually located in the areas excavated. In Trench B a substantial area was certainly disturbed by post-medieval quarrying, and even some boundaries may have been lost here. Trench A was less affected, although some degradation of the Romano-British horizons seems to have occurred. The most likely position for buildings may be marked by the surviving parts of two rectangular plots in the southwest quarter of Trench A, defined by F803 and F823/F305, and by F303/F826 and F301/F827 (Fig. 3). These appear to be drainage ditches surrounding small plots, within which timber-framed structures might have stood. Buildings of this character, set perhaps upon wooden base plates, would leave only slight traces, easily erased by later soil processes, cultivation or other relatively limited disturbances. Other structures may have been set further to the east, and the course of the secondary drainage ditches F843, F839, F841, etc. may to some extent have been determined by already existing buildings.

The remains in Trenches A and B evidently represent only part of a much more extensive layout. The ditch F917 and F700/F950 may mark a boundary of the settlement to the south and east, since remains of Period 2 are sparse or absent in these trenches, and nothing was observed during excavations for road access from Upper Holway Road. To the south -west the crest of the hill probably bounded the settlement here, and only a few ditches were observed to continue in that direction from the edge of Trench A during the watching brief on further road construction excavations. The remains found within the trench suggest that the main focus of settlement lies further to the north and north -west, and thus for the most part inaccessible beneath properties along Upper Holway Road.

Given the limitations of the evidence obtained by these excavations how much can be supposed of the character, status, and economy of this site in the later Roman period? The settlement appears to be based upon a system of small but fairly regular enclosures, some presumably containing houses or other buildings, while others may have been more open and perhaps larger, functioning as paddocks, kitchen gardens, or the focus for other activities associated with the life and economy of its inhabitants. It has been suggested that the buildings were of timber-framed construction, some possibly roofed with slate, while fragments of fired clay in certain deposits may reflect wattle and daub infill.

Hints of that economy are provided by both artefact and ecofactual material, most of

which found its way into the defining drainage ditch system of the settlement. Cultivated wheat (probably spelt) and barley was present, and probably grown by the inhabitants, although this cannot be conclusively proven, and no quern or millstone fragments were found. Barley was also grown for animal feed or was malted for making beer, although once again, neither of these activities can be proven at Hillyfields. Evidence for the animals themselves was very sparse, bone surviving poorly in the well drained and slightly acidic deposits on site, the only identifiable remains being a few teeth of sheep/goat and cattle.

Pottery vessels were undoubtedly only one class among other more perishable materials; on this site employed primarily as storage containers or for cooking. One unusual find was the iron bench anvil from the ditch terminal in Trench B (Fig. 7, no. 1). This, and a small quantity of slag suggests smithing and perhaps other iron-working at Hillyfields, if not some smelting of the metal. A spindle whorl from the same context indicates the spinning of thread, most probably from local sheep's wool. These items were part of one of the most informative deposits on the site, which also included a substantial group of pottery, part of a glass beaker, and a dump of charred plant remains which was dominated by cultivated cereal grains of barley and probably spelt wheat - the most commonly grown crops in Roman Britain. From its content and location within the terminal of a boundary ditch, apparently towards the southeastern boundary of the settlement, this was evidently a deliberate deposit. Whether this represents an act of symbolic ritual, as the association of such a group might suggest, or is part of an episode of site clearance, perhaps marking its final abandonment, is unclear. However, some combination of these elements is a likely explanation.

Local and regional context

All the evidence gathered points to the remains of a relatively modest rural settlement at Hillyfields, with a primarily agricultural basis. Given the limited scale of its exposure however, it is difficult to make detailed morphological comparisons with other types of rural settlement in Roman Britain. From the sample available, the Hillyfields settlement appears to fit within a local pattern of relatively dense rural farmsteads and villages, which were exploiting this rich agricultural area by the later Roman period. So far, only those at Norton Fitzwarren (Ellis 1989) and Maidenbrook Farm (Ferris and Bevan 1993) have been published in sufficient detail for meaningful comparison, and at only the latter was a sufficient area revealed to demonstrate a broad similarity, with arrangements of rectilinear enclosures in the later period of occupation. Equally, there are similarities in the material cultural assemblages, the more restricted quantity and range at Hillyfields perhaps reflecting no more than the smaller scale of excavation. All three sites had prehistoric antecedents, going back to the Middle Bronze Age in the case of Norton, although without the probable continuity from Iron Age into Roman apparent at Maidenbrook and Hillyfields. At Maidenbrook, the settlement site may have had a Late Bronze Age origin, with thereafter, continuity at a relatively fixed, valley-bottom location. Hillyfields appears to demonstrate a settlement shift in the later Roman period, uphill from an earlier Iron Age valley site beside the Black Brook, although its origins, once again, could lie in the Later Bronze Age. A progressively wetter valley-bottom

environment, resulting perhaps from greater land clearance, intensification of agriculture and thus increased water runoff and silting, might provide one explanation for relocation in the Roman period.

All three sites now lie within the modern bounds of Taunton, and there are traces of other Roman and later prehistoric settlements located more centrally beneath the town (Leach 1984). Closer at hand was the site at Holway, found during construction of the M5 motorway, where apparently comparable remains suggest another settlement sequence from Iron Age to Roman (SMR 43671). It is regrettable that without the publication of this, and other sites along that road corridor, data that would undoubtedly now assist greatly in our understanding of the early development and exploitation of the Vale of Taunton Deane is still no available. Between this site and Hillyfields a Roman coin hoard and burials were recorded during the 19th century (SMR 44244), raising the possibility of a more extensive settlement complex here. In all probability, Hillyfields in the later Iron Age and Roman period lay within a developed agricultural landscape of field systems and mainly small nucleated farmsteads, of which it was probably one. Parts of such systems have been revealed particularly well on the chalk downs of southern England, e.g. Knighton Bushes, Berkshire (Bowden, Ford and Mees 1993), or at Chalton, Hampshire (Cunliffe 1977), as well as in the valleys and lowlands of eastern England, e.g. the Thames Valley (Benson and Miles 1974) or the East Anglian Fens (Frere and St Joseph, 1983). At Hillyfields, there is clear evidence for a reorganisation of boundaries in the later Roman period, a process now widely recognised in southern Britain e.g. Fyfield, Wiltshire (Bowen and Fowler 1966), or at Sigwells in south-east Somerset (Tabor and Johnston, forthcoming).

It has been suggested (Leech 1982a) that the River Parrett represented something of a cultural divide between a highly Romanised society to the east and more insular communities to the west, where 'native' characteristics survived more strongly. Certainly the River Parrett was a political boundary, almost certainly the dividing line between the Roman Civitas of the Durotriges to the east and of the Dumnonii to the west; itself evidently based upon a cultural and political (tribal) separation from the later Iron Age at least. This is most apparent in the Roman period, as expressed through a generally richer material culture of sites in the eastern half of Somerset, as opposed to the west. In the east towns like Ilchester lay at the centre of a landscape of wealthy villa-based estates, and where large village settlements like Catsgore (Leech 1982b) or Sigwells (Leach and Tabor 1996) were characterised by mortared stone buildings, coinage was in regular use, and a wide range of metalwork, pottery, glass and other items, often imported, was more readily available. In rural Dumnonia, particularly westwards from Exmoor and Dartmoor, the Romano-British settlement and field patterns remained much closer to their prehistoric roots. Buildings of circular form, often within rounds or grouped as courtyard houses, as in parts of Cornwall, were the norm; mortared stone buildings are rare, and the level and range of material culture generally more impoverished.

The Vale of Taunton Deane may in fact have been atypical in the *Civitas Dumnonii*, owing more to the stronger Romanising influences of its eastern neighbour, at least in the later period. The degree of insularity and impoverishment of Romano-British rural

settlement west of the Parrett may have been over emphasised, but the contrasts between east and west were, nevertheless, very real. Coinage was scarce or absent (none at Hillyfields and Norton Fitzwarren), and other imported materials, such as non-ferrous metal artifacts, glass, or pottery were much less in evidence. The differences between pottery assemblages from sites in east and west Somerset illustrates the contrast well; the essentially local character of the western sites having already been noted (Timby 1989; Ferris and Bevan 1993). This is supported to an extent by the Hillyfields' assemblage, although the proportion of imports, notably East Dorset Black Burnished Ware (Fabric 1), is significantly greater than at the other two sites. It is probably unsafe to attach too much weight to conclusions drawn from such a low sample base, but this phenomenon, and perhaps also the new layout and relocation of the settlement in the later 3rd or early 4th century, may reflect some real difference between Hillyfields and some of its neighbours. The favoured use of BB1 suggests enhanced contacts with the neighbouring Durotrigan Civitas at least; the Purbeck shale spindlewhorl reinforcing this impression. Did these links come about through ownership and development of the Hillyfields' landholding by an outsider with Durotrigan origins or connections?, or was it part of a wealthier local landowner's estate with somewhat wider horizons? Such questions may no longer be answerable, but Hillyfields and its neighbours illustrate both the similarities and contrasts between different political zones within the unified province of Roman Britain, even where the local economies would appear to be very similar within a wider geographical region.

Post-Medieval land use

The Romano-British settlement was probably abandoned sometime from the late 4th century onwards, but as is so often the case with such sites no precise dates can be given after that time and occupation could have continued here well into the early post-Roman period. One or two sherds of medieval pottery may signify continuing later land use but there is no other clear evidence for activity at Hillyfields until the 18th and 19th centuries.

Two phases of use are then discerned, the earliest involving a parcelling up of the land into fields, which may have taken place at the time of enclosure in the late 18th or early 19th century. The clearest evidence for this was in Trench A, where the boundary ditch F808 was set at a right angle to the double boundary ditches F800 and F802 (Fig. 3). Hedges, banks or fences presumably accompanied these, although there was no evidence of this. The double ditches may have been slightly later, and continued to the south east across Trench B (F914/F913 and F916), where there was possibly an access through them (Fig. 4). These ditches may have flanked a narrow track, or perhaps a boundary bank, although no evidence of either had survived. Together, these boundaries suggest a division of Hillyfields into at least three smaller plots, but no further evidence of such subdivision was found.

A second phase of activity, documented mainly along the top of the hill, appears to represent shallow quarrying of the natural mudstone, possibly to obtain clay for brick-making. Three large borrow pits were encountered; one at the west end of BUFAU

Trench 3 (F312), apparently continuing as far as the northeast end of Wessex Trench 5 (5018). The second was seen more fully in Trench B (F912), and in BUFAU Trench 6 (F600), and the third to the south in Wessex Trench 4 (409), subsequently revealed as a much larger cut into the crest of the hill during the watching brief. All of these features were largely backfilled with clay, although still visible as indistinct shallow depressions on the surface. Part of a brick-built wall found in BUFAU Trench 4 (F400) may belong to structures associated with brick-making here, but this was not investigated further. Finds from the backfilling of the borrow pits suggest that this activity dates from the second half of the 19th century. The 19th-century discoveries of Roman remains at Hillyfields, and nearby, can almost certainly be attributed to these quarrying operations. Their full extent was not determined, but as a result, evidence of both the prehistoric and Romano-British occupations of the site had undoubtedly been lost here prior to the current phase of its development.

Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by C.G. Fry & Son Ltd. of Dorchester, in accordance with a Brief provided by Somerset County Council, and I am grateful to Philip Fry and to Nathan Pyett (Site Manager) for liaison; and for monitoring by Somerset County Council to Richard Brunning, Environment and Property Department. The excavation was ably supervised by Lesley Mather, assisted by Chris Hewitson, Ellie Ramsey and Dan Slater, to whom thanks are due. I am grateful to Wessex Archaeology for making their archive of records and finds readily available for incorporation within this report. This archive, along with those of the 1998 BUFAU evaluation and the subsequent excavation, have been deposited in the Somerset County Museum at Taunton Castle under the common accession number TTNCM: 75/1997. I am grateful to Dr Wendy Smith, University of Birmingham, for her contribution to this report, to colleagues in BUFAU for support and liaison throughout, and in particular to Simon Buteux for management, to Nigel Dodds for the illustrations, and to Gwilym Hughes for editing.

References

Allen, M. and Wyles, S. unpublished 'Palaeo-environmental Assessment' in Wessex Archaeology 1997.

Benson, D. and Miles, D. 1974 *The Upper Thames Valley: an archaeological survey of the river gravels* Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit.

Boardman, S. and Jones, G. 1990 'Experiments on the Effects of Charring on Cereal Plant Components' *Journal of Archaeological Science* **17**, 1-11.

Bowden, M., Ford, S. and Mees, G. 1993 'The Date of the Ancient Fields on the Berkshire Downs' *Berkshire Archaeological Journal* **74**, 109-133.

Bowen, H.C. and Fowler, P.J. 1966 'Romano-British Rural Settlements in Dorset and Wiltshire' in Thomas, C. (ed.) *Rural Settlement in Roman Britain* CBA Research Report 7.

Cunliffe, B.W. 1977 'The Romano-British Village at Chalton, Hants.' *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society* **33,** 45-67.

Ellis, P. 1989 'Norton Fitzwarren Hillfort: a report on the excavations by Nancy and Philip Langmaid between 1968 and 1971' *SANHS* **133,** 1-74.

Ellis, P. 1998 *Hilly Fields, Upper Holway, Taunton: Archaeological Field Evaluation 1998* BUFAU Report No. 533.

Evans, J. 1996 'The Roman Pottery' in Hughes, G. *The Excavation of a Late Prehistoric and Romano-British Settlement at Thornwell Farm, Chepstow, Gwent* BAR British Series 244.

Ferris, I. M. and Bevan L. 1993 'Excavations at Maidenbrook Farm, Cheddon Fitzpaine, 1990' *SANHS* **137,** 1-40.

Frere, S. S. and St Joseph, J.K.S. 1983 *Roman Britain from the Air* Cambridge University Press.

Hillman, G. 1981 'Reconstructing crop husbandry practices from the charred remains of crops' in Mercer, R. J. (ed.) *Farming Practice in British Prehistory,* 123-162. Edinburgh University Press.

Hillman, G. 1984a 'Traditional husbandry and processing of archaic cereals in recent times: the operations, products and equipment which might feature in Sumerian texts. Part 1: The Glume Wheats' *Bulletin of Sumerian Agriculture* **1,** 114-152.

Hillman, G. 1984b 'Interpretation of archaeological plant remains: the application of ethnographic models from Turkey' in van Zeist, W. and Casparie, W.A. (eds.) *Plants and Ancient Man: Studies in Palaeoethnobotany,* 1-41. Rotterdam.

Holbrook, N. and Bidwell, P. T. 1991 *Roman Finds From Exeter* Exeter Archaeological Reports 4.

Jacomet, S. 1987 *Prahistorische Getreidefunde eine Anleitung zur Bestimmung Prahistorischer Weizen-und Gerstenfunde* Unpublished manual.

Lawson, A.J. 1976 'Shale and Jet Objects from Silchester' *Archaeologia* **105,** 241-275.

Leach, P. 1984 *The Archaeology of Taunton* Western Archaeological Trust, Bristol.

Leach, P. and Tabor, R. 1996 'The South Cadbury Environs Project' *SANHS* **139,** 47-57.

Leech, R.H. 1982a 'The Roman Interlude in the South West' in Miles, D. (ed.) *The Romano-British Countryside. Studies in Rural Settlement and Economy* BAR British Series No. 103.

Leech, R.H. 1982b *Excavations at Catsgore 1970-1973: a Romano-British Village* Western Archaeological Trust, Bristol.

Manning, W.H. 1985 *Catalogue of Romano-British iron tools, fittings and weapons in the British Museum* British Museum.

Nesbitt, M. and Samuel, D. 1996 'From Staple Crop to Extinction? The Archaeology and History of the Hulled Wheats' in Padulosi, S., Hammer, K. and Heller, J. (eds.) *Hulled Wheats. Promoting the Conservation and Use of Underutilized and Neglected Crops 4. Proceedings of the first international workshop on Hulled Wheats, 21-22 July 1995,* 41-100. Rome: International Plant Genetic Resources Institute.

SMR *Somerset Sites and Monuments Record,* Somerset County Council.

Stace, C. 1997 *New Flora of the British Isles* (second edition) Cambridge University Press.

Tabor, R. and Johnston, P. forthcoming 'Sigwells, Somerset, England: Regional Application and Interpretation of Geophysical Survey' *Antiquity,* Vol.74.

Timby, J. 1989 'The Roman Pottery' in Ellis, P. 1989.

Tomber, R. and Dore, J. 1998 *The National Roman Fabric Reference Collection* Museum of London.

van der Veen, M. and Feiller, N. 1982 'Sampling Seeds' *Journal of Archaeological Science* **9**, 287-298.

Wessex Archaeology 1997 *Land at Hilly Fields, Upper Holway, Taunton. Archaeological Field Evaluation* Wessex Archaeology Ltd.

Woodward, A . 1989 'The Prehistoric Pottery' in Ellis, P. 1989.

Woodward, P., Davies, S.M. and Graham, A.H. 1993 *Excavations at Greyhound Yard, Dorchester 1981-4* Dorset Natural History and Archaeology Society, Monograph 12.

Young, C. J. 1977 *Oxfordshire Roman Pottery* BAR British Series No.43.

Zohary, D. and Hopf, M. 1994 *Domestication of Plants in the Old World: The Origin and Spread of Cultivated Plants in West Asia, Europe and the Nile Valley* (second edition). Oxford, Clarendon Press.

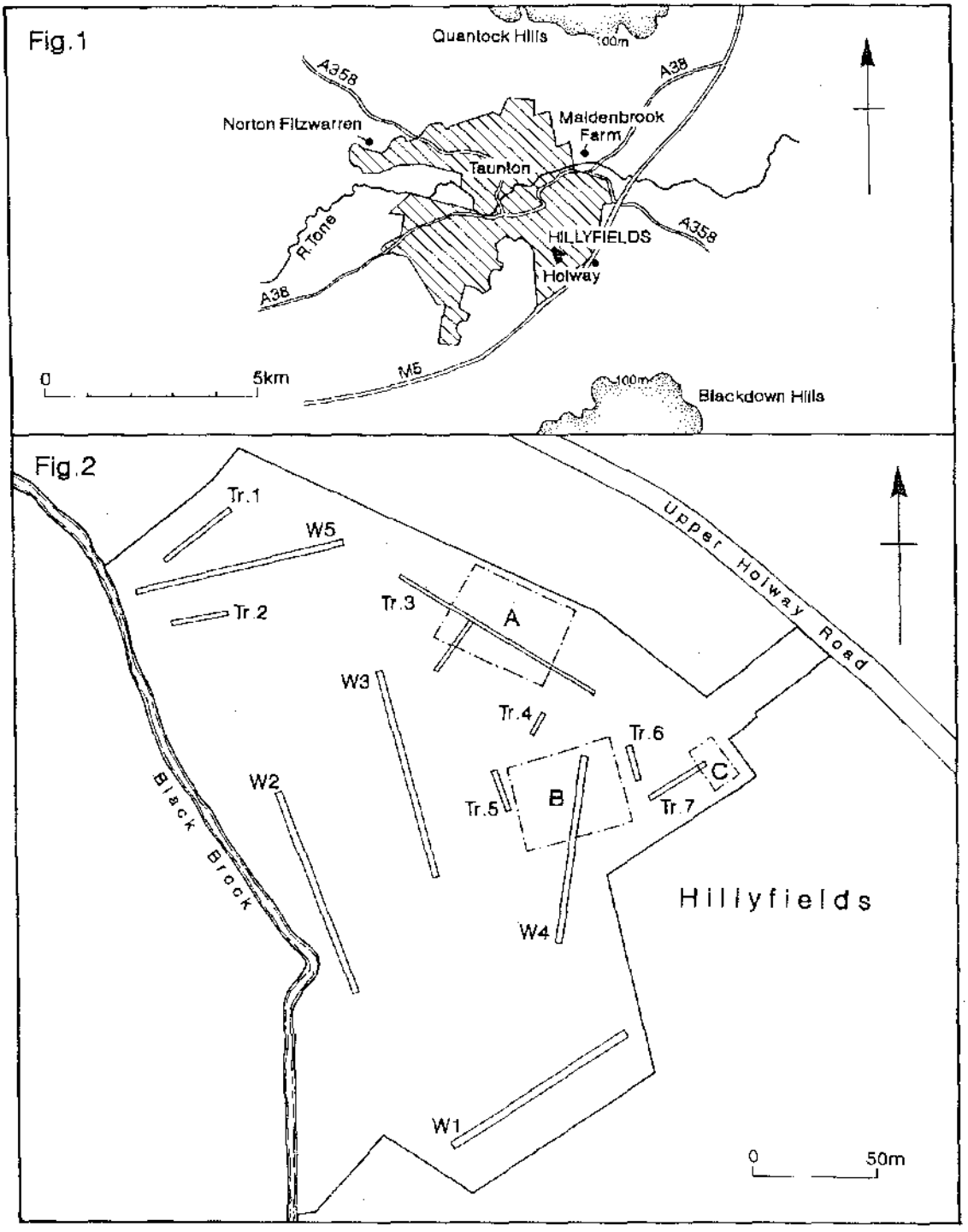
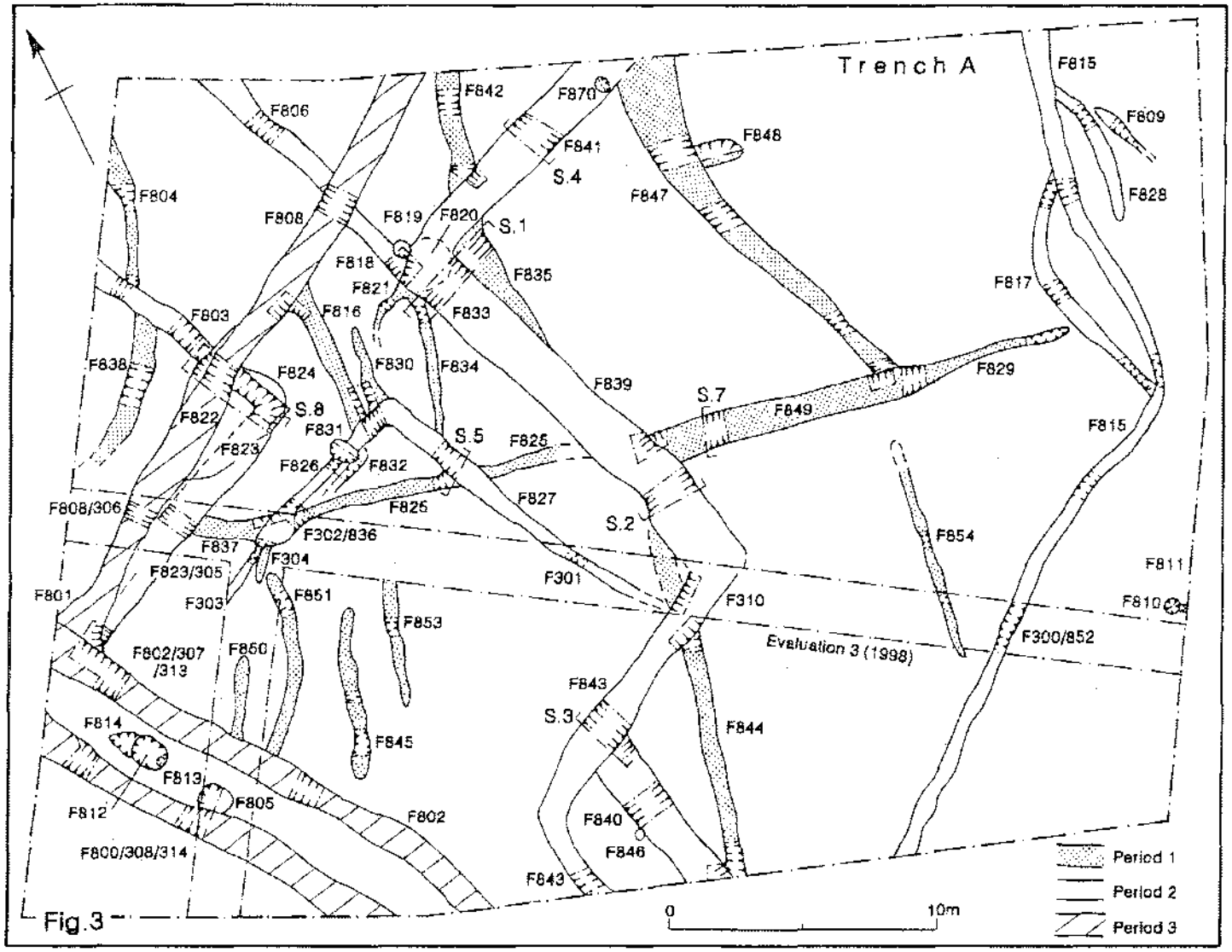


Fig.1
Quantock Hills
100m
A358
A38
Norton Fitzwarren
Maidenbrook Farm
Taunton
R.Tone
HILLYFIELDS
A358
Holway
A38
0
5km
M5
100m
Blackdown Hills
Fig.2
Tr.1
W5
Tr.2
Tr.3
A
W3
Tr.4
Tr.6
C
W2
Tr.5
B
Tr.7
Black Brook
W4
Upper Holway Road
Hillyfields
W1
0
50m


Trench A
F606
F842
F870
F841
S.4
F848
F847
F615
F609
F828
F804
F808
F819
F820
S.1
F818
F821
F835
F817
F803
F816
F833
F838
F824
F830
F834
F839
S.7
F829
F822
S.8
F831
F849
F815
F823
S.5
F825
F826
F832
F827
F808/306
F825
S.2
F854
F837
F302/836
F304
F823/305
F301
F811
F801
F303
F851
F310
F810
F853
F300/852
Evaluation 3 (1998)
F802/307
/313
F850
F843
S.3
F844
F814
F845
F813
F805
F812
F802
F840
F846
F800/308/314
F843
Period 1
Period 2
Period 3
0
10m
Fig.3

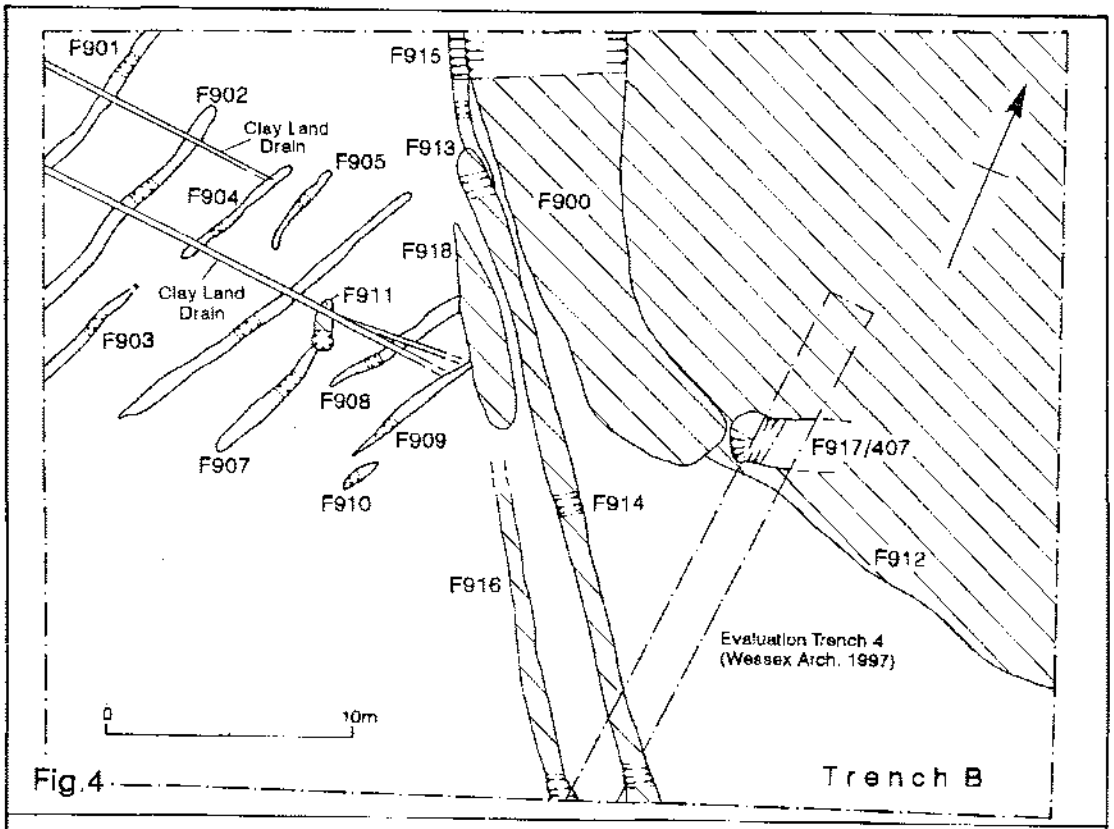

F901
F902
Clay Land Drain
F905
F904
Clay Land Drain
F903
F907
F908
F909
F910
F911
F915
F913
F900
F918
F917/407
F914
F916
F912
Evaluation Trench 4 (Wessex Arch. 1997)
0
10m
Trench B

Fig.4

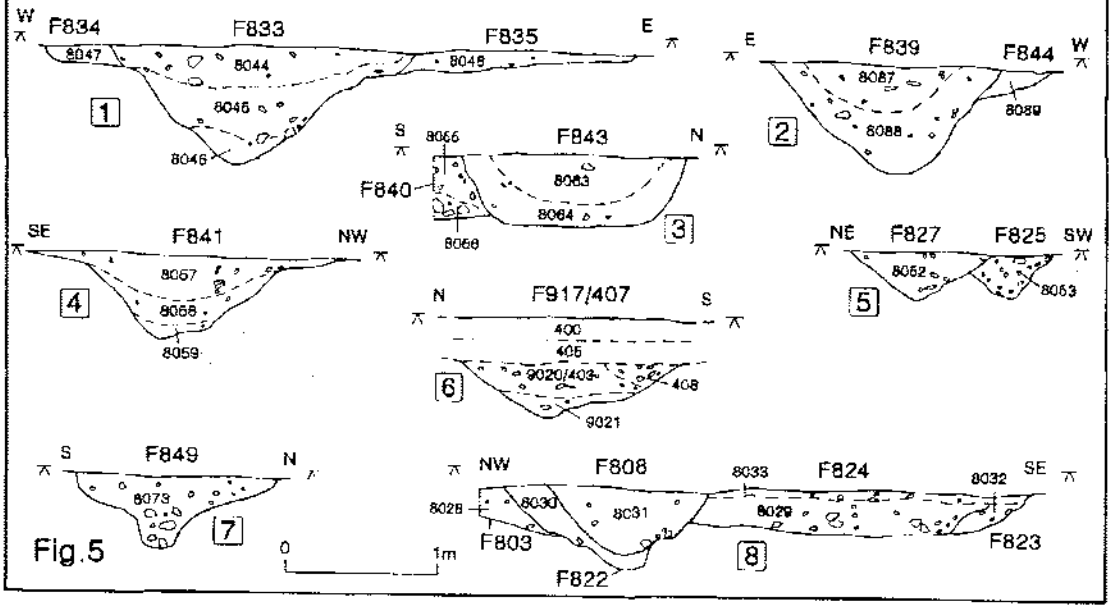

W
F834
F833
F835
E
8047
8044
8045
8046
1
S
8066
F843
N
F840
8063
8064
8068
3
E
F839
F844
W
8087
8089
8088
2
SE
F841
NW
8057
8058
8059
4
N
F917/407
S
400
405
9020/403
408
9021
6
NE
F827
F825
SW
8052
8053
5
S
F849
N
8073
7
NW
F808
8033
F824
8032
SE
8028
8030
8031
8029
F803
F822
F823
8
0
1m

Fig.5

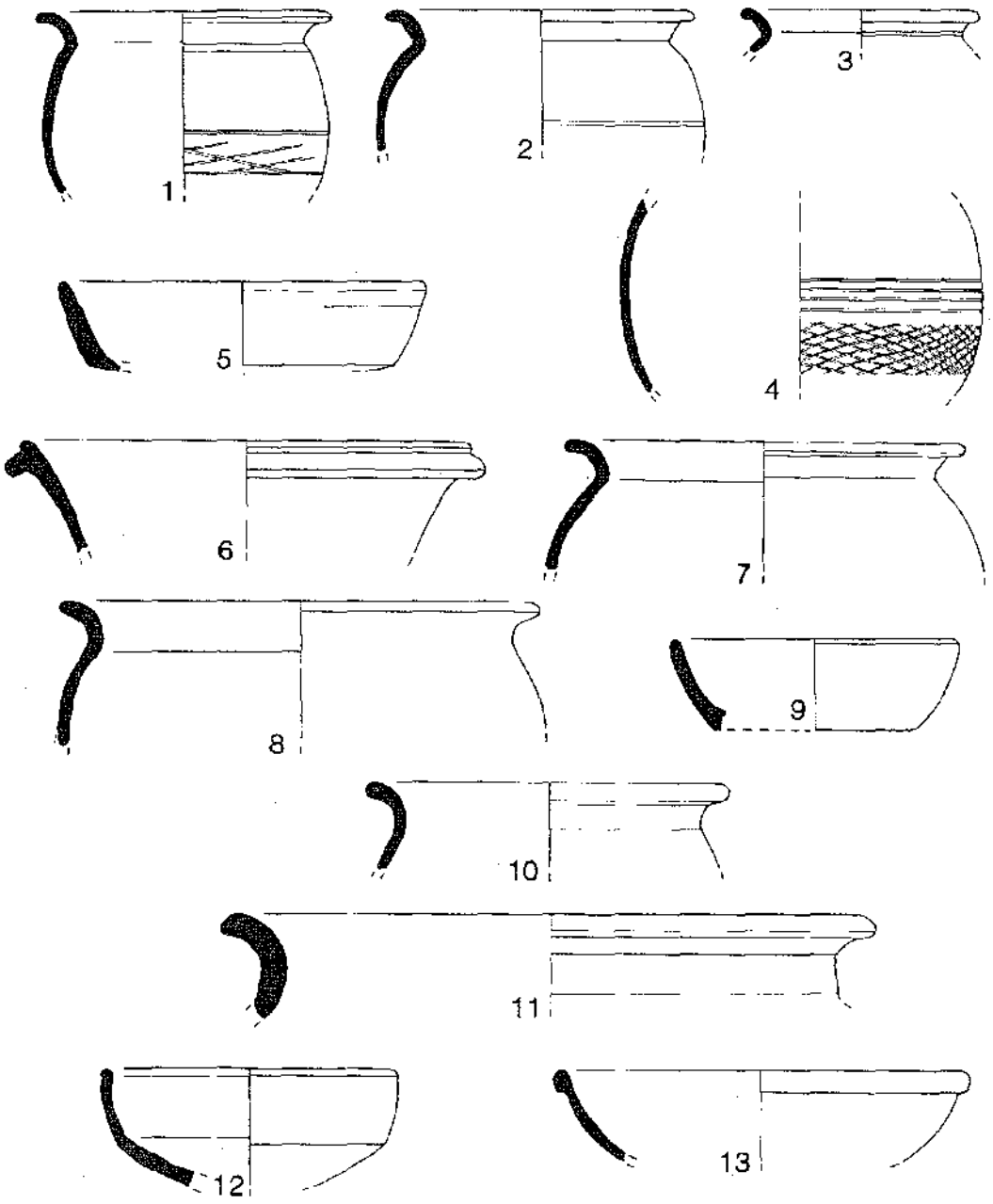


Fig. 6

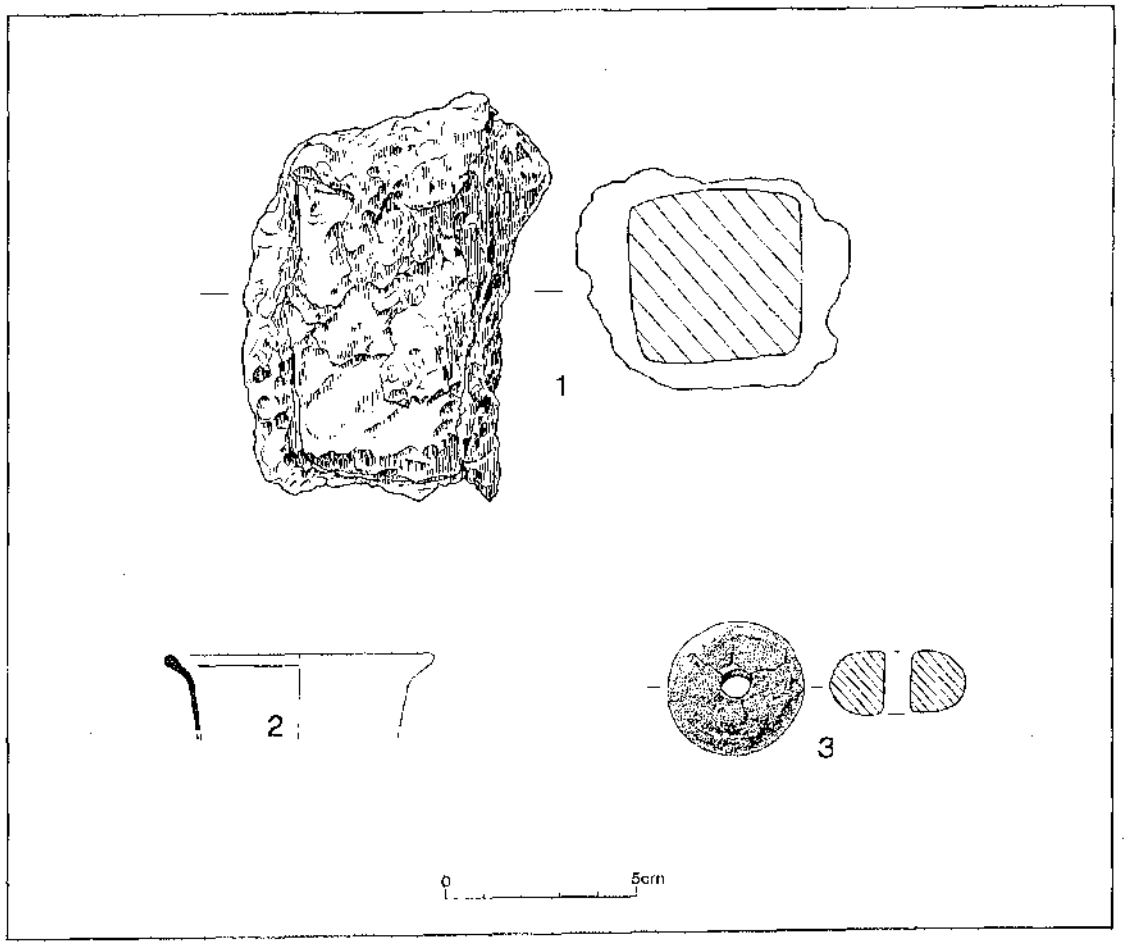


Fig. 7

Figure 8. Breakdown of the types of plant remains recovered in the Hillyfields samples

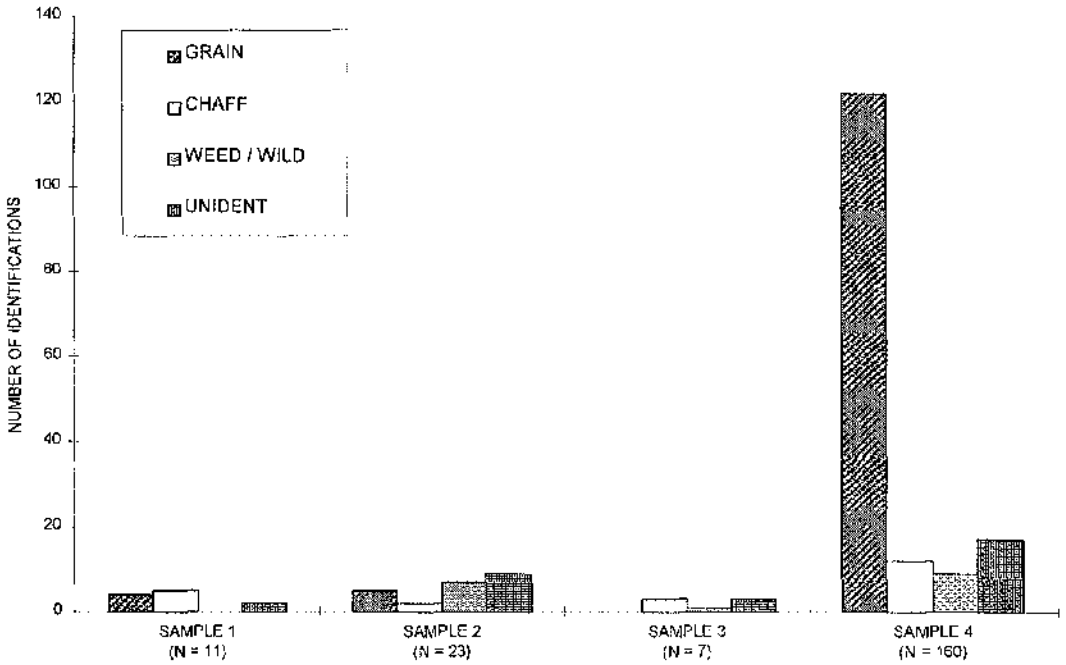


Table 1 : Hillyfields : The Roman and Prehistoric Pottery Assemblage

Fabric	Total Sherd count	Total Sherd count %	Total Weight Grams	Total Weight %	F917 Sherd count	F917 %	F917 Weight grams	F917 Weight %
1. BB1	213	42.2	2490	38.9	134	26.5	1855	29.0
2. BB copy	120	23.7	1825	28.5	91	18.0	1490	23.3
3. Grey ware – fine	14	2.8	95	1.5	1	0.2	20	0.3
4. Grey ware – medium	71	14.0	485	7.6	8	1.6	70	1.1
5. Coarse storage ware	30	5.9	735	11.5	5	1.0	190	3.0
6. Grey-buff ware	21	4.2	115	1.8	-	-	-	-
7. Oxford R.C.C.	11	2.2	185	2.9	4	0.8	115	1.8
8. Oxford mortaria	10	2.0	355	5.6	6	1.2	285	4.5
9. Samian	3	0.6	20	0.3	1	0.2	05	>0.1
Iron Age Fabrics	12	2.4	90	1.4	-	-	-	-
Totals:	505	100%	6395g	100%	250	49.5%	4030g	63.0%

Table 2. List of taxa recovered from Hillyfields

Sample Number	1	2	3	4	
Context Number	8088	8087	8066	9021	
Feature Number	F839	F839	F840	F917	
Context Type	ditch	ditch	ditch	pit	
Provisional date (AD)	3/4	3/4	late 4	late 4	
Sample volume (L)	20 L	20 L	18 L	12 L	
Flot volume (ml)	10 ml	210	150	150	
Seeds per litre	0.6	ml	ml	ml	
Percentage of sample sorted	100%	1.2	0.4	13.3	
		100%	100%	100%	
CEREALS					**COMMON NAME**
Triticum dicoccum Schübl. / *T. spelta* L. - glume base	4	2	2	11	emmer / spelt
Triticum spelta L. - glume base	1				spelt
Triticum sp. - grain	3	2		36	wheat
Triticum sp. - glume			1		wheat
Hordeum sp. - grain (hulled)		1		25	barley
Hordeum sp. - rachis internode				1	barley
Cereal - indeterminate - grain	1	2		61	cereal
WEED / WILD PLANTS					
Chenopodium sp.				2	goosefoot
Rumex sp.		3		2	dock
Vicia hirsuta (L.) Gray			1		hairy tare
cf. *Vicia hirsuta* (L.) Gray		1			cf. hairy tare
Vicia sp. / *Lathyrus* sp.				3	vetch / pea
Fabaceae - unidentified - small seed		1			pea family - unidentified
cf. *Centaurea* sp.		1			knapweed
Avena sp. - awn		1			wild or cultivated oat
POACEAE - unidentified large caryopsis				2	grass family - unidentified
Unidentified - leaf		1			unidentified
Unidentified - bud		1			unidentified
Unidentified	2	7	3	17	unidentified
Total Identifications	11	23	7	160	